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# The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists celebrates 50 years of activism



TIMOTHY COLE

MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY RALLY IN ATLANTA GEORGIA, JANUARY 2015.

By all accounts the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Civil and Human Rights Conference in Atlanta, Georgia hosted by the AFL-CIO was a huge success. “Even though the meeting was across the border it felt like I was home,” said CUPE Diversity VP Yolanda

McClean. “We spoke of the need to raise the minimum wage, have access to affordable child care, and most importantly reaching into our communities to get the vote out. Both countries – within their communities are struggling to mobilize the vote,” she said.

The conference took place in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Voting Rights Act. This legislation reformed how people of colour were able to participate in the political process. Over 700 delegates from across the USA and a few from Canada gathered to strategize and continue Dr. King’s dream of organizing for social and economic justice.

Delegates took to the streets on Martin Luther King Day. “Thousands of people came out. With every step I took I thought as I take these steps I’m making a commitment on our next steps as labour and civil rights communities to make change happen and make life better for our communities. It was so powerful,” said McClean. ●

# MIGRATION IN 2015

“International Trade Agreements and the resulting poverty coupled with a lack of social protections and violence were all recognized as reasons for the increased migration of women and children. Some countries are reporting an increase in migration as high as 50 per cent,” said Sheryl Burns one of CUPE’s delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW59) meeting in New York city.



SHERYL BURNS, CUPE DELEGATE TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, AND ELIZABETH DANDY, DIRECTOR OF CUPE EQUALITY IN NEW YORK CITY IN MARCH.

Burns along with Elizabeth Dandy, Director of the CUPE Equality Branch attended the meeting in March.

The need for decent work as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) was widely recognized at the UNCSW59 and supported by many representatives and delegates, including the trade union delegation. “Because temporary migration is embedded in these trade agreements, a trend of “circular migration” has emerged in which citizens are expected to migrate to receiving nations on a temporary basis to meet labour demands, subsequently returning home, with new-found skills,” said Burnes. “While receiving countries rely on migrants, they have adopted hostile immigration policies that leave migrants with few, if any rights and protections.”

Women, many of whom were migrants, spoke at the UNCSW59. Their stories told

of significant pain, hardship, violence, loneliness and fear. They described years of separation from loved ones, including spouses and their children. Transgender migrants described imprisonment, torture and even death upon entry into receiving nations.

Many of these women recognize that organizing and forming alliances with trade unions is the only way to address the increasing exploitation of migrant workers and have formed powerful organizations such as the National Network for Immigrant Rights and Migrant Rights International in order to lobby on behalf of migrant and domestic workers.

“If Canada is to address its role in the exploitation of migrants, including domestic workers, they must ratify the Domestic Worker’s Convention, Convention 183 and other related Conventions,” said Burns. ●

Global Justice is published three times a year to provide workers and their representatives an overview of international solidarity work taken on by the Global Justice fund and within CUPE as a whole.

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**CUPE** Canadian Union of Public Employees

# CUPE Global Justice in Action from Colombia to the Philippines

**C**UPE 1949 members are administrative assistants, legal assistants and lawyers that work in Legal Aid offices across Saskatchewan.

the organization's continued efforts in engaging local community leaders in human rights education and building networks that repair the social

**We should be more active in promoting our shared values of social justice, both as union members and legal professionals.**

Several years ago, during a membership meeting, we discussed getting involved in a movement to support union activity internationally. One member discussed the dangers and risk of grave harm that union leaders and members face in Colombia.

As a local, there was a strong sense that we should be more active in promoting our shared values of social justice, both as union members and legal professionals. After discussion, our local passed a motion to provide financial support and to partner with Nomadesc, an organization working mainly in southwestern Colombia.

Nomadesc is a human rights organization that advises and accompanies members of social organizations, unions and other organizations. It works to defend the rights of Colombian communities and trade unionists through education, accompaniment, advocacy and mobilization.

Nomadesc is having an impact in Colombia. Through updates, we have learned of

fabric of their war-torn country. Nomadesc works directly with victims of the conflict to assist with access to the justice system.

Given that our membership works to provide individuals with assistance and fair representation in the justice system, our partnership is well matched.

At the CUPE Saskatchewan convention in March, delegates heard from another courageous union activist - this time from the Philippines. Rose Nartates is an activist within COURAGE – Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees. Hearing Rose speak about the struggles that union leaders, members and workers are facing in her country reinforced my belief that we need to be ever diligent in our commitment to work collectively for the advancement of workers, both in our own communities and in the global village. ●

**Brenda Freriks is a member of CUPE 1949 in Saskatchewan.**



ROSE NARTATES, AN ACTIVIST WITHIN COURAGE (CONFEDERATION FOR UNITY, RECOGNITION AND ADVANCEMENT OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES) FROM THE PHILIPPINES, INSPIRED CUPE MEMBERS AT THE SASKATCHEWAN AND ALBERTA DIVISION CONVENTIONS.

## A volunteer's experience in Ghana

**K**imalee Phillip, Equity Officer with CUPE 1281 left for Ghana in January 2015 for a five-week stay to work as a Program Development Innovator with Youth Challenge International – a Toronto-based non-profit organization that sends youth volunteers to various parts of the world to undertake and support educational, organizational development and health and wellness initiatives.

Ghana is located in West Africa and prior to European colonization, was previously known as the Gold Coast. Phillip was excited about

returning to the land of her ancestors. As a Program Development innovator, Philip was tasked to create a fundraising strategy for an organization called Enactus, and also served as a programming/skills development trainer for the YMCA in Accra.

For Philip this was an important learning experience. Philip is clear that “Our presence is always political.” Working with an international charity in a poor country was an opportunity for her to reflect on the impact development aid from rich countries has on a society.

“The use of language for example can be political. While in Ghana, I realized that some people were called immigrants, whereas others were called expats. An expatriate (expat) is anyone who lives outside of their native country or who settled overseas, but that term was largely applied to white people. This criteria is used to differentiate who belongs in the country based on the colour of one’s skin or one’s class and social status,” said Phillip.

There is an ongoing electricity and fuel crisis that often leaves many Ghanaians without electricity for sometimes 12-24 hours daily. For Phillip her presence in Ghana also

challenged her to consider whether her presence and that of many international charities is actually helping to improve social and economic disparities.

“Ghana will always welcome me,” said Phillip. “The kind and open spirit of the Ghanaian people is welcoming to everyone. It is important to understand that predatory and exploitative economic and political global systems under the guise of benevolent development programs and goodwill, unwillingly contribute to ongoing patterns of global inequities. Development paradigms in Ghana is no exception to this practice,” said Phillip. ●

**1. A victory with global implications** In January 2015, a political party called Syriza, who ran on an anti-austerity agenda won the general elections in Greece. This was a significant victory for the people of Greece because they have been organizing and mobilizing against cuts in social benefits and employment, privatization and growing inequality following the 2008 global financial crisis. The European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, popularly referred to as the Troika, forced austerity conditions and policies on financial loans to the country which resulted in millions of unemployed, thousands of small businesses closed, rising levels of poverty and about 500,000 families surviving without any income at all. This Syriza victory is a victory with global implications in the fight against austerity measures.

**2. Advancing trade union rights in the struggle for quality public services** CUPE sent a delegation, led by National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury, to the 11<sup>th</sup> Inter-American Regional Conference of PSI (IAMRECON) in Mexico City from April 20 to 24, 2015. Held under the banner “Advancing trade union rights in the struggle for quality public services!” the conference was an opportunity to connect and exchange with PSI affiliated unions on issues such as international trade and investment, privatization, pensions, climate change and tax justice. The conference followed a two-day meeting of the energy, education, health and municipal sectors.

**3. Stop Bill C-51** In January 2015, the government of Canada tabled Bill C-51 the *Anti-Terrorism Act*. CUPE is voicing strong opposition to this bill because it threatens the civil liberties and democratic freedoms of all people living in Canada. We are deeply concerned about the intentions and impact of the changes proposed to the Criminal Code, law enforcement, rights of due process, rights of free speech, privacy protections and the expansion of the government’s intelligence gathering powers, all of which are encompassed in this legislation. Bill C-51 is a profound threat to all our freedoms, particularly to people from marginalized communities and/or those who oppose the federal Conservative government such as trade union activists and our allies in civil society. For more information, go to: [cupe.ca/stop-c-51](http://cupe.ca/stop-c-51).



## NEWS IN BRIEF